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Leisure-Time Safety on the Farm



United States
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Leisure-Time Safety on the Farm

As a farmer, you probably have more opportunities for a wider variety of leisure-time activities than your friends in the city. Like your city friends, you can spend your leisure time playing cards, watching television, or going to the movies. But you can also jump into your farm pond, drive a snowmobile on the south 40, hunt without leaving the farm, and participate in many other outdoor activities.

You can enjoy leisure time on the farm in many ways. But because of your relaxed mood, your activities often can be more hazardous than when you drive a tractor or work in the milking parlor.



Swimming and Suntanning—Farm ponds have many benefits. They provide water for firefighting, irrigation, livestock, and recreation, such as swimming, boating, ice skating, and fishing. If you have a pond on your farm, make it a safe one :

- Mark safe swimming areas.
- Supervise small children when they are in or around water, and encourage them to learn to swim.
- Provide lifesaving devices, such as ringbuoys, ropes, planks, and so forth.
- Never swim alone.
- Stay away from ponds during storms and when spillways are flowing.

Along with swimming on hot, sunny days goes suntanning. Many people consider a dark tan a sign of health. But a dark tan can do your body more harm than good.

To avoid over exposure to the sun, which can happen when you are working in the fields, too, keep these simple precautions in mind :

- Limit your exposure, particularly your initial exposure, gradually increasing your suntanning times. If you have light, sensitive skin, you may burn quickly, especially during your first exposures. The hours of greatest risk are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

- Since clouds and water will not shield you from ultraviolet radiation, be wary on cloudy days, and count water time as sun time.
- Use suntan lotions to help protect your skin from the sun.
- Protect your eyes with sunglasses, a wide-brimmed hat, or both, and cover your arms with a long-sleeved shirt.



Skating—If you live in a freezing climate, you may use your pond for ice skating. To be safe for skating, the ice should be at least 3 inches thick. Check it carefully before venturing onto it.



Boating—If you have a large farm pond, or live near a river or lake, you may spend some of your time in one of America's most popular sports—boating.

If your pond is small, you may be able to use a rowboat or a canoe. If you have access to a large body of water, you may want to use a power craft. In either case, certain safety precautions are necessary :

- Have Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices for each person aboard.
- Never overload a boat.
- Don't stand up in a small boat.
- If your boat has a motor, avoid fast, sharp turns.
- Head for shore when a storm approaches or if it begins to rain, especially when you are on a farm pond.



Bicycling—Rural America has plenty of open spaces and roads for bicycling. Although rural roads carry less traffic, the traffic generally moves faster than in the city. Consequently, in a rural bicycle-car collision, the impact can be much more forceful and life-threatening to cyclists.

Gravel roads can present cycling problems, and secondary rural roads are often quite rough. Rural roads can also be hazardous if they are so narrow you must pull off the road to allow traffic to pass. Abrupt dropoffs from the roadbed to the shoulder can spill or throw you.

If you drive a bicycle on your farm, your worries about motor vehicles are lessened. But you have other problems—rocks, holes, fences, weed-obscured objects, steep slopes, ditches, low tree branches, and other hazards. Bicycling, as a leisure-time activity in rural areas, can be safe—if you follow a few precautions:

- Make sure your bicycle is mechanically sound.
- For night cycling, wear reflective or light-colored clothing, and equip your bicycle with lights and reflectors. In some areas, a horn or bell may be required.
- Obey traffic laws, signs, and signals, and walk your bicycle across busy intersections.
- Drive with traffic, keep to the right, and use hand signals when you are going to turn or stop.
- Don't carry passengers or large objects if they block your vision.
- Limit your downhill speed, keep your bicycle under control, and be prepared to stop.



Horseriding—A farm is a natural setting for horseriding. If you or your visitors ride horses during work or leisure times, here are a few common safety practices to follow:

- Wear comfortable but protective clothing, such as jeans or other long pants to avoid scratching your legs on bushes and gates.
- Never ride barefooted. Wear shoes or boots with heels so your feet won't get caught in the stirrups.
- Mount your horse from the left side and in an open area away from buildings, trees, and fences.
- Don't startle or "spook" your horse by approaching it from behind. When you are riding and about to pass other horses, be sure the other riders know you are going to pass.
- Keep to the right on trails, and slow down when turning corners. This will help your horse avoid losing its footing or colliding with other horses.
- Watch for low branches or other obstructions.



Snowmobiling—In northern climates where snow is adequate, you may enjoy your leisure time by snowmobiling. In many cases, you can do this on your own farm. Here are some snowmobile safety precautions to follow :

Before you start your snowmobile, read the owner's or operator's manual that comes with the machine. Basic training is necessary to safely operate any snowmobile. Join a local snowmobile club, and learn from people with more experience than you have. Your snowmobile dealer should be able to help you with basic instructions, too.

Here are some other considerations : Know the snowmobiling laws in your State . . . treat your snowmobile with respect . . . and be courteous to other people.

Be sure your headlights and taillights work and are free of road dirt, slush, or snow. Drive more slowly at night, and don't "overdrive" your headlights or rely on moonlight to see where you are going.

Don't snowmobile on roads. Many States and counties prohibit snowmobile travel on roads. Even so, 37 percent of the 103 fatal accidents involving snowmobiles during winter 1979-80 were on roadways.

Lake, river, and quarry accidents accounted for 29 percent of snowmobile deaths in winter 1979-80. Most of these were the result of poor judgment in estimating ice strength and driving in low-visibility evening hours.



Dressing for Cold Weather—Dress warmly for outdoor winter activities, such as snowmobiling, skiing, or skating. Windproof and waterproof clothing is recommended. The amount and type of clothing you should wear underneath depend on the weather. Wear clothing in layers that are not too tight. Gloves, a helmet, and goggles can add to your safety and comfort.



Hunting and Targetshooting—If you enjoy hunting or targetshooting or if you permit them on your farm, you or your visitors should follow these simple guidelines for safe shooting :

- Don't rely on your gun's "safety." Treat every gun as if it were loaded and ready to fire.
- Never cross a fence, climb a tree, or jump a ditch with a loaded gun.
- Never load or carry a loaded gun until you are ready to use it.
- Watch your muzzle so others won't have to.
- Keep guns and ammunition separate and locked when in storage.
- Don't shoot unless you are absolutely sure of your target and what is beyond it.

- Know the range of your gun. Remember, even a .22-caliber bullet can travel more than a mile.
- Wear personal protective equipment for your eyes and ears when shooting.
- Always be sure the barrel is clear of obstructions, and carry ammunition of only the proper size for the gun you are using.
- Always carry handguns with the hammer down on an empty chamber.

Thinking about Safety—There are many other leisure-time activities you may enjoy on your farm. Whatever the activity, learn to do it competently and safely. Make sure children receive proper training and supervision when learning and building skills.

And, finally, don't overdo. Choose activities that are right and safe for you. Then, stop before you are exhausted. You will avoid risks to your health and accidents.

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